

IOWA OUTDOORS

Iowa Department of Natural Resources
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ROADSIDE SURVEYS FORECAST FALL PHEASANT PROSPECTS

By Joe Wilkinson

Iowa Department of Natural Resources

From 30 yards away, Dennis Proctor could make out a head and body hunched in the roadside grass. As he stepped out of the truck for a closer look, a rooster pheasant exploded into flight, just clearing the 9-foot high corn on the other side of the road ditch.

Entering a hash mark on his chart, Proctor continued down the gravel road. He was early into his 30-mile roadside count, on a humid, dewy morning in Cedar County. This was the second pheasant; the first rooster. “You look for just any kind of movement; maybe something brown out there, when everything around it is green,” explains Proctor. “If there is a rise in the road ahead, you can bet there is probably something up ahead as you go over it.”

Often, it’s a flock of blackbirds or a couple mourning doves. Sometimes, though, it is a hen pheasant and her half-grown brood, coming out of the wet grass to dry out on the sunny, gravel road. Other times, it is a lone rooster, a cottontail rabbit or a covey of partridge.

Rain and overcast skies in the first week of August put many of those sunrise counts on hold. “The birds want to come out of the wet grass to dry off in the sun,” explains Todd Bogenschutz, upland research biologist for the Department of Natural Resources. That’s when they are most visible to wildlife workers and conservation officers spread out over 210 routes through the state. “If there’s no sun, there’s no point for them to stay in the open,” says Bogenschutz. Partway into his own route around Boone early this week, Bogenschutz postponed it because of cloudy skies.

The routes are the backbone of Iowa's annual pheasant forecast and of fall plans for game bird hunters from Iowa and across the Midwest. A boost in pheasant survey numbers means more hunters tromping the fields come late October. A noticeable downturn sends many elsewhere. In 2006, August numbers were down 22% from the year before. As a result, Bogenschultz's fall forecast was scaled back. Those figures are watched closely by hunters making vacation plans for their fall and winter. The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service estimates that hunting provides a \$167 million annual impact for Iowa. Pheasant hunting plays a big part in that.

This year, late March blizzards and heavy rain in April and May dampened prospects in some regions, months ahead of the August surveys. "The weather we've seen in southwest, south central, west central, central and northeast Iowa suggests bird numbers will be lower or unchanged from last year," forecast Bogenschultz in his spring nesting outlook, noting heavy rains in April and May - four to six inches above normal in many areas. On the other hand, better spring conditions in northwest, north central, east central and southeast Iowa *could* yield improved counts.

Iowa's best counts have come from northwest Iowa the last couple years. But we'll have to wait for that picture to form. Many of the routes are now just wrapping up, due to persistent rain and overcast early-morning skies in early August.

Results from any single route are not critical. As all come in, though, they provide a pretty accurate index of populations for pheasants, as well as partridge, quail, cottontail rabbits and jackrabbits. Proctor tallied just 10 pheasants on his 2007 Tipton-area route; down significantly from the 33 he saw last year. At the same time, his rabbit total (12) was double that seen in a typical year...and he counted perhaps an all time high when we rounded a corner and added a covey of 14 partridges to an earlier pair seen a few miles away.

Overall, though, the pheasant numbers on his route were closer to its long-term average. "It's all habitat, or lack of it," underscores Proctor. "Most of the ground here is in corn and soybeans. The grassy cover, even the ditches, has been mowed. There's just not a lot of habitat. There has to be nesting habitat, and *over-wintering* habitat to see more birds in August."

Bird counts generally are higher on Chuck Steffens' southern Iowa route, which covers the corners of Wapello, Mahaska and Keokuk counties. "I saw 38 this year; up from the mid 20s average there," reports Steffens, wildlife biologist from the DNR. "I'd say we had a reasonably good hatch here this year." He also lauds the 'hey day' of the region, which is now intensely row-cropped, too.

Bogenschultz posts statewide and regional results in mid-September on the DNR website. Go to www.iowadnr.gov and click on 'hunting & wildlife,' then 'hunting and trapping,' then 'upland wildlife' to sign on for automatic notice when the multi-page report is ready.

WATERFOWL WORKSHOP SATURDAY AT NEAL SMITH

PRAIRIE CITY, Iowa – A Wetlands Management Workshop is scheduled for Saturday, Aug. 18, at Neal Smith National Wildlife Refuge, near Prairie City. Sessions will run from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.

DNR wildlife biologists will be presenting information on the challenges of wetland management in Iowa, particularly as it relates to waterfowl production and hunting.

For more information contact DNR Waterfowl Biologist, Guy Zenner at 641-357-3517.

IOWA FISHING REPORT

For the week of August 14, 2007

www.iowadnr.gov

Fishing reports will be issued EVERY OTHER WEEK into the fall. For current information on fishing conditions for your lake or area, contact the office in that district. Phone numbers are listed with each district report.

Northeast

Mississippi River Pools 9 to 15: Water levels on the Mississippi River are steady to slightly rising. On Monday, the water levels were 12.4 feet at Lynxville, Wis., 3.68 feet at Guttenberg, 7.0 feet in Dubuque, 3.25 feet at Bellevue, and 8.66 feet at Camanche. Water temperature is 82 degrees. During the August heat, the shallow backwater areas have become anoxic (low dissolved oxygen levels) especially on cloudy days. In order to survive, many fish species—bluegills, crappie and largemouth bass—that are typically found in the backwater areas have moved into the flowing side channels, main channel and tailwater areas, which provide current and higher oxygen levels. Wing dams continue to be the best areas to fish for a variety of species in the late summer. In general, fishing has been slow for just about everything except catfish and drum. Boaters are reminded to stay alert as lower water levels increases the underwater hazards like wing dams, stumps and rocks. Also, care should be taken at the boat ramps; often in these low water conditions, boaters can easily back off the end of the cement ramp and damage the boat trailer axle.

Fishing is good for channel catfish in **Pools 9 to 15**. Fish worms or stink baits by drifting the bait under a bobber through the rocks and riprap areas in the main channel and running sloughs. Also try fishing stink baits along the woody debris in the side channels or out on the ends of wing dams.

Fishing for freshwater drum (sheephead) is consistently good in **Pools 9 to 15** using a simple sliding sinker and a night crawler on the bottom. Drum up to 5 pounds are being caught using crayfish as bait. The big ones are more for sport, although, some anglers used them for smoking. Night crawlers will yield fish of all sizes, but primarily the smaller edible-size fish. Drum are found mostly in current situations and you do not need a boat to catch them. Tailwater areas and wing dams are good areas to fish for drum, but remember to move if you do not get a bite within 15 minutes.

Walleye fishing is slow, the best place to fish walleyes is the tips of deeper wing dams in 10 to 16 feet of water in **Pools 9 to 15**. In **Pool 9**, anglers are reporting that walleye fishing is picking up.

Bluegill fishing has been spotty, but many anglers are having luck fishing the wing dams and main channel in **Pools 9 to 15** using night crawlers on the bottom and off of brush piles. Fish a small piece of worm on a slip bobber along the base of the inside and middle sections of the dams for bluegills. Anglers are catching nice bluegills in Desoto Bay (**Pool 9**). There is a new universally-accessible fish walkway at the main boat ramp in Harper's Ferry (**Pool 10**) and anglers are already catching bluegill and even crappie towards the evening hours.

Crappie fishing is fair in **Pools 9 to 15**. Look for crappies in brush piles in flowing side channels. In **Pool 10**, the Harper's Ferry area is good for crappie fishing in the sloughs.

Largemouth and smallmouth bass fishing is fair to good in **Pools 9 to 15**. Bass hit on a variety of lures including small spinners, crankbaits, jigs, top-water lures, and soft plastics. Both species are feeding heavily along rocky areas with current and are currently being caught near wing dams. The key to bass fishing is to find habitat and structure. Riprap banks, snags and logs along the shoreline or a combination of these structures is even better.

White bass fishing is fair to good in **Pools 9 to 15**. Look for schools of them chasing shad and then cast white spinners into the mayhem for some quick action. Look for them in the tailwater areas; however, white bass have also been observed corraling bait fish into the back sides of the wing dams. White bass have been especially active in **Pool 11**.

Northern pike fishing is fair to good in **Pools 9 to 15**. Pike seek cool water inputs like creek mouths and springs. Spinners, larger crankbaits or white jigs work well.

Cedar River (Mitchell, Floyd and Chickasaw): Water levels are low. There are a few reports of walleyes being caught below the dam at Charles City. Some anglers are catching walleye in the deeper pools with a slower retrieval. The river near Osage and downstream has been excellent for the smaller smallmouth bass. They are being caught with just about any color jig fished in the riffles and the faster current. Channel catfishing is good above the dam on night crawlers, dead chubs and dead minnows.

Cedar, West Fork Cedar and Shell Rock rivers (Butler, Bremer and Black Hawk): Fishing has improved due in part to stable water conditions. Channel catfish are biting well on night crawlers, chicken liver and stink baits. Smallmouth bass fishing is

good using crankbaits or jigs tipped with a night crawler in the Cedar and Shell Rock rivers. Fishing is fair for walleyes using jigs tipped with a night crawler. Concentrate along rocky shorelines or current breaks near logjams.

Maquoketa River (Delaware): Fishing is fair to good for channel catfish.

Turkey River (Clayton): Water clarity is good throughout most of the river and should continue to be good as long as the heavy rains stay away. Smallmouth bass fishing is excellent using night crawlers, twister tails or shad raps fished in the riffles. Rock bass are being caught on small pieces of night crawlers fished next to rock boulders and riprap. Walleye fishing is good all day using a variety of lures. Channel catfishing is good below the dam at Elkader using cut baits and a variety of other catfishing favorites.

Upper Iowa River (Winneshiek and Allamakee): Water clarity is good above the upper dam, but becomes muddy further downstream. Walleye fishing has been good using crankbaits, white twister tails and jigs tipped with night crawlers and other live bait above the upper dam. Below the lower dam, walleye fish has been slow. Fishing for smallmouth bass is good above the upper dam using twister tails, shad raps, crankbaits, and night crawlers fished in areas with good current. Below the lower dam, smallmouth fishing is slower, but a few are still being caught.

Wapsipinicon River (Buchanan): Fishing is fair to good for channel catfish.

Yellow River (Winneshiek and Allamakee): Smallmouth bass fishing is excellent on a variety of lures. Quite a few trout are also being caught.

George Wyth and South Prairie Lake (Black Hawk): Channel catfish are biting on stink baits and dead chubs.

Brinker Lake (Black Hawk): Crappies are biting in the early morning and late evening hours. Fish a jig tipped with a twister tail or minnow in 6 to 10 feet of water over structure or close to the bottom.

Lake Delhi (Delaware): Channel catfishing is fair to good using chicken liver, stink baits, cut baits or worms fished on the bottom.

Lake Hendricks (Howard): Channel catfishing has slowed, but can be caught using chicken liver, stink bait, cut bait or worms on the bottom. Try fishing in less than 7 feet of water as the depths beyond 7 feet are experiencing depleted oxygen levels. The catfish that are being caught now are larger fish. Fishing is fair for bluegills on wax worms or a piece of night crawler suspended under a bobber. Try using smaller gear when fishing mid-day to hook the finicky ones. Largemouth bass fishing is excellent using a wide variety of artificial and live baits. Some anglers are trolling minnows in the deeper water to avoid the vegetation.

Lake Meyer (Winneshiek): Channel catfish are feeding in 2 to 5 feet of water in the east end of the lake. Catfishing is good using chicken liver, dead chubs or stink baits. Avoid using night crawlers because the smaller bluegills will usually strip the hook before the catfish can get to it. Smaller crappie can be caught along the weed edges using crappie jigs. Try fishing in 8 to 10 feet of water on the west side next to the weed edge. Anglers are catching larger crappies by trolling in deeper water. You will have few strikes, but larger fish using this method. Bluegill fishing is good on night crawlers or angle worms fished under a bobber near the weeds, with sorting of some smaller fish required. Largemouth bass fishing has slowed, but the lake has been known to produce some big fish this year.

Volga Lake (Fayette): There is an excellent population of channel catfish, with a good number being in the trophy-size range. Try fishing in the water that is 7 feet deep or less to avoid low-oxygen conditions. Largemouth bass fishing is good in the early morning and late evening hours. Use slower-moving artificial lures worked along structure. Bluegill fishing is good using wax worms or night crawlers on a very small hook suspended under a bobber.

Kids' Pond (Clayton): The Kid's Trout Pond offers a great place to get young kids out trout fishing before school starts. If you've been looking for a place to take young kids or grandkids to catch a trout before going back to school, you're in luck! A new *kids' only* trout fishing pond is now open to the public at Big Spring Trout Hatchery near Elkader. This is the first of its kind and is an experimental program. The pond provides easy access and is an excellent fishing opportunity for anglers age 12 and under hoping to catch that first fish. It is also a way for parents to discover Iowa's trout program. The pond is stocked weekly with catchable size rainbow trout and brook trout. Listed below are a few rules that apply in order for the kids' pond program to be successful. The most important of these rules is that each child needs to be accompanied by a licensed adult for safety reasons.

Kids' Pond Fishing Rules:

1. Pond is open to fishing for kids age 12 and under.
2. All kids **MUST** be accompanied by a licensed adult (Fishing license + trout privilege)
3. There is a 2 trout limit per child per day (2 fish limit also applies to trout caught & released)
4. All trout kept must be part of the licensed adult's 5-trout limit, unless the child has their own trout privilege
5. Artificial tackle must be used if kids intend to catch and release their 2 trout.

Other trout fishing opportunities at Big Spring include a new angler access trail along the Turkey River adjacent to the hatchery and a trout fishing pond open to the public at the entrance to the hatchery. The Turkey River is stocked three times per week and is currently in excellent fishing condition. During the heat of the summer, mornings and evenings provide the most comfortable fishing. For further information contact Big Spring Hatchery at 563-245-2446.

Trout fishing and stream conditions are excellent. Mornings and evenings usually provide the best success for catching trout. In mid-summer, these times of day are easier on the angler as well. Many trout stream stockings are announced and the dates of proposed stockings can be found on the Iowa DNR website at www.iowadnr.gov or by calling the trout stocking hotline at 563-927-5736.

For information on fishing in northeast Iowa, call the regional office in Manchester at 563-927-3276.

Northwest

Spirit Lake (Dickinson): Anglers are catching yellow perch fishing the deeper weed lines with traditional jigs. Bluegill fishing has been fair on deeper weed lines and rock humps. Fishing is fair for bullheads at the grade using night crawlers. Some nice northern pike have been caught using spinner-baits and buzz-baits.

West Okoboji Lake (Dickinson): Bluegill fishing is fair on deep rocks using garden worms. Northern pike fishing is good in Millers Bay trolling crankbaits along the weed lines.

East Okoboji Lake (Dickinson): Yellow bass fishing has been steady jigging with Pilkies or other small jigs tipped with Belgian worms. Muskie fishing is good trolling.

Lake Pahoja (Lyon): Crappie fishing is good for smaller fish

Black Hawk Lake (Sac): Fishing is good for catfish on chicken liver, drifting skinned chubs and stink bait. Lots of fish in the 1 to 2 pound range with an occasional fish up to 5 pounds. Fishing is good to excellent for carp on dough balls.

Storm Lake (Buena Vista): Channel catfish fishing is good on chicken liver, fresh shad and stink bait.

Crawford Creek (Ida): Fishing is fair for bluegill drifting small leadheads.

Clear Lake (Cerro Gordo): Yellow bass are hitting live bait or cut bait around rock reefs and the deeper water between the Island and Dodge's Point. Yellows in the 7-8 inch range are being caught along with a few of the large yellows. Walleye fishing is fair on the rock reefs using a jig and crawler.

Beeds Lake (Franklin): Crappie fishing is fair. Small crappie jigs trolled along the causeway is working the best. Sorting is required for the larger fish. Largemouth bass are hitting spinner baits and plastic worms and jigs, especially in the early morning and evening hours.

Lower Pine Lake (Hardin): Channel catfish are hitting on chicken liver.

Upper Pine Lake (Hardin): Channel catfish are hitting on chicken liver. Bluegills are biting on night crawlers on the outside edge of vegetation. Largemouth bass are being caught on spinner baits and plastics.

East Fork of the Des Moines River (Kossuth): Channel catfish fishing is good using liver, frogs and stink baits near snags.

Smith Lake (Kossuth): Largemouth bass fishing is good. Spinner baits and jerk baits are working the best. Remember Smith Lake has an 18-inch minimum length on bass. Channel catfish angling is good using chicken liver, stink baits and dead chubs.

Lake Cornelia (Wright): Channel catfish angling is excellent using chicken liver, stink bait and dead chubs.

For more information on fishing in northwest Iowa, call the regional office in Spirit Lake at 712-336-1840.

Southwest

Farm Ponds: Channel catfish are biting on night crawlers or liver.

Icaria (Adams): Anglers are catching channel catfish.

Little River (Decatur): Channel catfish are biting from the bays on stink baits.

Wilson (Taylor): Channel catfish are biting on stink baits or liver.

Windmill (Taylor): Channel catfish have been caught on liver.

Green Valley (Union): Fishing is fair for channel catfish on night crawlers in the shallow bays.

Three Mile (Union): Some bluegills can be caught from the flooded trees 8 to 12 feet deep. Walleye can be caught from the mounds or the old roadbed.

Three Fires (Taylor): Some nice channel catfish can be caught on liver or stink baits. Largemouth bass fishing is good near structure.

Contact: Gary Sobotka (641) 464-3108 for information on the above area lakes.

Big Creek (Polk): Catfishing is fair on chicken liver. Crappies are being caught on small minnows and jigs fished under a bobber and bluegills are hitting on jigs and bait. Try drifting out in the main lake, shady areas or mornings/evenings for the best results.

Hickory Grove (Story): Fishing was slow over the hot weekend. Some channel catfish were caught using worms.

Saylorville (Polk): Catfishing is excellent right now. Most anglers are using cut bait and shad. Drifting in 15 feet of water seems to be producing the most fish. White bass and wiper fishing is still consistent. Small crankbaits and spinners in white or chrome are the best bet.

Saylorville Dam (Polk): Lots of channel catfish are being caught in the rocks on liver and shad. Most fish are being caught in the evening and night. Some walleye are also being caught on jigs.

Easter Lake (Polk): Catfishing is fair on chicken liver and night crawlers. Small bluegills are biting on worms under a bobber.

Don Williams (Boone): Crappie fishing is decent on tube jigs and minnows. Most fish are good sized with fish up to 14 inches. Catfishing is decent on night crawlers with most ranging from 1 to 2 pounds.

Red Rock (Marion): White bass are still being caught on the main lake. Crankbaits, jigs and spinners that represent shad are producing.

Rock Creek (Jasper): Catfishing was excellent over the weekend with lots of anglers catching limits. Stink bait seemed to be working the best with most fish being 2 to 3 pounds.

Contact: Ben Dodd (515) 432-2823, Ext.108, for information on the above area lakes.

Orient (Adair): Channel catfish are fair during the day on prepared baits. Bluegills are slow using small jigs and tipped with night crawlers. Largemouth bass fishing is fair using a slow retrieve and plastic worms in the evenings.

Nodaway (Adair): Bluegills and crappies are slow, but a few are being caught around brush piles. Channel catfish is fair using liver in the evenings.

Greenfield (Adair): Bluegill fishing is fair with fish being caught around brush piles or drifting jigs tipped with night crawlers. Largemouth bass are being caught using plastic baits and spinner baits. Channel catfish fishing has been fair using liver.

Morman Trail (Adair): Bluegills are slow on south and west side of lake. Channel catfish is fair using liver around jetties and in the shallow bays in the evening. Largemouth bass can be caught on plastic baits.

Littlefield (Audubon): Crappie fishing is slow, but a few are being caught drifting a jig and minnow. Bluegills are slow casting a small jig tipped with night crawlers. Channel catfish has been fair in shallow bays and corners of the dam using stink bait.

Anita (Cass): Anglers are catching 7 to 8-inch bluegill using jigs from shore and around the jetties. Channel catfish, 2 to 6 pound size, are being caught on night crawlers

and blood bait. Largemouth bass fishing has been fair for fish up to 18 inches. Crankbaits and jigs have been used around brush piles and rock piles.

DeSoto Bend (Harrison): Crappie fishing is slow. Channel catfish is fair using dip baits with a red worm.

Manawa (Pottawattamie): Channel catfish is fair drifting cut bait or shrimp.

Arrowhead (Pottawattamie): Bluegills are slow using jigs with night crawlers. Fish are 7 to 8 inches. Channel catfish are fair using liver and prepared bait close to shore around jetties.

Prairie Rose (Shelby): Fishing is slow for crappies and bluegill drifting jigs tipped with minnows or night crawlers. Channel catfish is slow fishing shallow bays with liver. A few largemouth bass are being caught using crawdad-colored lures.

Willow (Harrison): Bluegill fishing is slow with a few fish being caught on jigs tipped with night crawlers. Bass fishing has been fair with 12 to 14-inch fish being caught on plastic worms and crankbaits.

Schaben (Harrison): Bluegills are fair using small jigs tipped with night crawlers. Largemouth bass are also being caught on night crawlers and plastic baits.

Middle Raccoon River (Guthrie): The "No Kill" stretch below Lenon Mills is fair for smallmouth bass using 1/32 ounce jigs tipped with a night crawler.

Farm Ponds are good for largemouth bass, bluegill and channel catfish. Be sure to ask permission from the landowner first.

Contact: Bryan Hayes (712) 769-2587 for information on the above area lakes.

For more information on fishing in southwest Iowa, call the regional office in Lewis at 712-769-2587.

Southeast

Mississippi River Pools 16 to 20: Water levels throughout pools 16 to 20 have fallen since last week's rise. Water levels at Lock and Dam 15 are 3.74 feet, 3.87 feet at Lock and Dam 17, and 1.71 feet at Lock and Dam 18. River stage at Muscatine is 5.69 feet. Water temperature is around 85 degrees.

Channel catfish are being caught on leeches, night crawlers, stink baits and shad guts.

Walleyes are being caught trolling crankbaits in the side channels. Some walleyes are also being caught on the wing dams using crankbaits or three-way rigs with night crawlers or leeches.

Crappies are being caught in deeper water in the backwater areas on minnows. The dredged areas of the **Big Timber** backwater complex have produced some crappies.

Bluegills are being caught on wax worms and pieces of night crawler.

White bass are being caught below the locks and dams and around the spillways. Look for schools of fish breaking the surface.

Lake Darling (Washington): Water temperature has been in the middle 80s. Catfishing is still fairly good either in the late evening or early morning.

Lake Geode (Henry): Look for the water temperature to be in the upper 80s this week. Catfishing has been good on stink bait. Look for the fish to be around the rip rap areas where they are looking for crayfish and young of the year bluegills.

Lake Belva Deer (Keokuk): Bluegill fishing is slow with a few anglers catching some early in the morning before the sun comes up.

Lake Rathbun (Appanoose): Walleyes and white bass have been hitting on crankbaits being trolled along rocky drop-offs and underwater islands. Channel catfish have been biting on liver and night crawlers.

Lake Sugema (Van Buren): Largemouth bass have been hitting on a variety of artificial lures, with the mornings and evenings being the most productive times. Bluegills have been hitting on small jigs, especially early and late in the day.

Lake Wapello (Davis): Channel catfish have been biting on night crawlers and liver. Largemouth bass have been hitting on a variety of artificial lures with morning and evening being the most productive times.

Lake Miami (Monroe): Channel catfish have been biting on night crawlers.

Skunk River (Washington and Henry): Last week's rains brought the river up to near flood stage with some low areas flooding. The end of the week saw water levels drop several feet. Between the fast rise and fall of the water level and the hot weather, anglers did not have many fishing opportunities.

For more information on fishing in southeast Iowa, call the regional office in Brighton at 319-694-2430.

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